

Minutes: Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC)

Retreat–August 26, 2011 – 9:00 a.m. -3:00 p.m.

The Cornhusker Hotel, Lancaster Room 4-5-6; Lincoln, Nebraska

Welcome and Introductions

Terry Rohren called together members and technical assistants to a retreat meeting of the ECICC at 9:05 a.m. on August 26, 2011 at the Cornhusker Hotel, Lincoln, Nebraska. Terry thanked the Nebraska Department of Education–Office of Special Populations for funding the retreat from their Part C ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) grant.

Heather Gill, ECICC chair, welcomed meeting participants, who were assigned seats at six round tables. Retreat participants introduced themselves.

Members present: Mike Adams, Sue Adams, Rebecca Bimler, Annie Bruns, Pam Dobrovolny, Carol Fichter, Heather Gill, Cheryl Hammond, Jane Happe, Melody Hobson, Sian Jones-Jobst, Eleanor Kirkland, Heather Krieger, Diane Lewis, Carol McClain, Dawn Mollenkopf, Christy Pelton, Roger Reikofski, Deb Ross, Julie Rother, DeAnna Schulze, Carolyn Thiele, Joyce Thomas, Salene Ulrich, Cristen Witte.

Members absent: Eric Dunning, J.P. Holys, Julie Middendorf, Pete Pirsch, Todd Reckling, Leisha Suckstorf, Linda Zinke.

Also in attendance: *ECICC Staff:* Terry Rohren, ECICC facilitator; Susan Dahm, secretary; *Technical Assistants:* National Child Care Information Center–Rae Anderson; Head Start State-based Training and Technical Assistance–Mary Finney-Afrank; PTI-Nebraska–Connie Shockley; NDHHS–Lynne Brehm, Amy Bunnell, Shirley Pickens-White, Sue Spanhake; NDE–Amy Bornemeier, Pat Frost, Joan Luebbers; *Retreat facilitator:* Mary Lee Brock.

Heather introduced Mary Lee Brock, retreat facilitator from the Werner Institute, Creighton University. Mary Lee described her role as helping a group that is good become better. She explained the process for the day and reviewed objectives:

- An opportunity to provide specific input about improving the format and support members receive before, during, and after Council meetings–what’s working? What could help it be better?
- Council members will better understand the scope of early childhood work across state agencies and how they are connected.
- Council members can clearly communicate the purpose of the Council and its goals and share that information with others.
- Council members feel more engaged and prepared to advise and provide recommendations to improve and streamline early childhood systems in Nebraska.

Mary Lee noted that during the activities of the day “points of frustration” could be very productive.

Note: Refer to the attached flip chart notes for additional details from activity discussions reported below.

Activity 1–Table Discussions:

What aspects of Council meetings have been most productive?

When do you feel most engaged as a Council member?

- Retreat participants discussed questions at their assigned tables and briefly reported on their observations:
 - Opportunity to network, especially beyond the agenda.
 - Other agencies’ updates and reports.
 - Meeting as smaller groups but then with larger group to recognize unique versus systemic issues.
 - Timeframe for being on the Council is too short [i.e., member term].

- Going into the meeting knowing the goal, i.e., what’s ahead.
- Need better understanding of grants, Sixpence.
- Potential for Race to the Top and money to make great inroads—but then it goes away.
- Family presentations.
- Talk about how we relate with faith-based organizations.
- Making sure that we are continually capturing and sustaining our goals.
- Tying work to the Report to the Governor—what happens?
- Relating a topic to the overall chart to become more conscious of restrictions, unintended consequences.
- Knowing history of the group; appreciating the new energy of new members.
- Dedication for helping all kids and opportunity to look at the larger system.
- Presentations helpful.
- Energizing to be part of community will, to influence political will, with resources that follow.
- Seeing how things come together.
- Building relationships; not an “us versus them.”
- Being asked for feedback—equals engagement.
- Realizing if something is brought up it will be addressed.
- Responsiveness of people on the committee.
- Facilitator summary of productive aspects/most engagement:
 - Networking, relationships, shared goals.
 - Engaged when there is something to do when we leave—a responsibility.
 - Hearing from other people “on the ground.”
 - Building capacity and understanding.
 - Hearing family committee experiences—“Aha” moments.
 - Evolution of the Council; changes through the years; better feeling of role than earlier.
 - Recycling what’s good—how do we hang on to what is meaningful, purposeful?

Activity 2–Panel Presentations

Representatives from state agencies who do work focusing on early childhood issues will each give an overview of the work of their agency related to early childhood.

Note: DHHS=Department of Health and Human Services; NDE=Nebraska Department of Education

- Panelists briefly introduced themselves and their work:

Heather Krieger: DHHS manager. Works with the Co-Leads [DHHS and NDE] on Part C early intervention services and coordination.

Carol McClain: NDE administrator, Special Education. Works with Part C—infants and toddlers ages birth-3 with disabilities. Carol explained the uniqueness of the Co-Lead arrangement and the challenge to bridge interagency differences in rules.

Melody Hobson: NDE Office of Early Childhood, co-administrator with Carol Fichter. Works with approval of Early Childhood programs (school districts), monitoring, Results Matter, and administration of CCDF (Child Care Development Fund).

Diane Lewis: DHHS, child care grants manager. Works directly with child care providers with funding; also knows child care licensing; makes it happen with persons rather than policy.

Lynne Brehm: DHHS Division of Public Health. Works across different systems, each with different policies and procedures; coordinates the Together for Kids and Families strategic plan across

systems addressing five topic areas; manages work groups with stakeholder input—complex and complicated work; referred to the ECICC linkages chart as a depiction of complexity.

Eleanor Kirkland: NDE, Office of Early Childhood—has several roles. Directs the Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO), the only Head State entity that is state-funded; all other Head Start entities and programs are federally funded. Also administers Early Head Start—federal money given to the state for local subgrants to target early literacy; currently only two programs are left in Nebraska. Eleanor explained the State Advisory Council (SAC) provision in the 2007 Head Start Act and the Governor's designation of ECICC as the Nebraska SAC. The Governor appointed Eleanor to coordinate the 2009 ARRA grant that funds SAC priorities.

- Panelists discussed three things they want to accomplish in the next two years:

Eleanor: Focus, reflect, act. Facilitate state and local partnerships. Conduct annual needs assessments.

Lynne: Bring together groups across systems to continue to implement the strategic plan. Work on the different activities in the plan. Keep ECICC represented in the work.

Diane: Continue doing what needs to be done with dwindling funds; sees increasing need for child care subsidy; sees funding decreasing.

Melody: Develop a sustainable quality proposal for the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC). Revise Rule 11, the regulations for schools districts and ESUs with early childhood programs—need to include regulations for birth-3 and home visitation programs, which sometimes partner with DHHS. Look at regional training coalitions to embed linkages across areas and also vertically—connect across the state for seamless transitions with support for children and families.

Carol & Heather: Focus on children and families. Ensure that all children referred for Part C services are screened appropriately and evaluated to improve the number of children receiving services. Ensure that parents and families have leadership skills to take positions across the state by supporting training and Planning Region Team activities. Develop regional support systems regarding behavioral health. Carol noted that these have grown out of ARRA-funded activities identified as most promising for continuing funding from IDEA (IDEA—Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

- Panelists identified ways that the Council can better support their work:

Heather: Identifying issues with the Gaps and Barriers Committee (GBC)—the Co-Leads inform the GBC, the GBC informs the Co-Leads; supporting the Family Leadership Team through activities and in the Council.

Melody: That each ECICC member and technical assistant (TA) is like bindweed—possesses a deep well of knowledge and interconnects with other things, is resilient and tenacious. Wants to use the Council's circles of influence—members provide influence and serve as a resource; and wants the Council to understand the small steps that move toward goals.

Diane: Understand and acknowledge requirements and restrictions on funding—it's like a grocery store: there are many different kinds of fruit available that we would enjoy and that would be good for us, but we are only allowed to have a couple of them. Our funding is like that—there are limitations on how we can use it.

Lynne: Understand some of the constraints from state, federal and local government. Find ways to make things happen for families; our goals are the same—to support children and families.

Talked about the Early Childhood Systems Team (ECST) and keeping the work connected to the Council, but about expanding to get the “right” people at the table to meet other requirements; to bring money into the state...

Eleanor: Members use personal experience to develop and support purposeful and developmentally appropriate practices for adults and systems. Engage local communities, seek partners, build sustainable partnerships, and don’t let personalities get in the way of practices.

- Panelists identified one area that the Council has not focused on and should:

Eleanor: Data systems—a SAC priority—to consider data from state to inform policy; be a voice to help in developing, be involved.

Lynne: Noted that funding instability makes it difficult to focus (wonder if will be funded). Thinks the Council should celebrate how much we work together; celebrate our collaboration.

Diane: Celebrate successes. There will be significant changes coming—reducing government, reducing spending—celebrate what we can.

Melody: Using data for programs improvement, to improve outcomes. We are questioning every expenditure; it will be crucial to be able to show that public monies are well spent, spent with integrity, and that they strengthen the country. Focus on quality early learning environments, especially as they are articulated in school readiness—we are setting stage for future success in school and as adults, so it is important to look at those environments. Find ways for us to be creative partners at state and local levels.

Carol: Regarding the Part C six-year state plan (SPP) and the Part C Annual Performance Report (APR) that reflects progress on indicators—Find time for the Council to develop an understanding about the SPP and APR. Hopes that we can adjust and find ways for the Council to become more informed and help with strategies for improvement. A state project/emphasis in education is to improve graduation rates from high school—this begins with early intervention and quality early childhood services and programs.

Heather: Partner in results and outcomes. Funding wants to see cost savings and outcomes/results. We will have to develop strong partnerships to pool resources to support successful initiatives/quality services so they can continue. The Council needs to be assessing the good things we are doing, and how to continue providing for them.

Activity 3—Questions and Answer Session with the Panelists

- *Question:* Regarding the Council’s understanding of constraints—how do we ask? We don’t know what we don’t know.
Answers: This is a safe place. It is OK to learn, know, and understand. Read between the lines. There’s some discomfort in asking questions. Also need to understand protocols in terms of what we can and can’t do. Hear more about concrete issues.
- *Question:* What does “creative partners” mean? How do we work on these partnerships?
Answers: We need to question how we are building capacities in local communities. We need to work on communication, talking in the same language, try to approach it as if talking to a new group. Work at pulling together people across groups and systems. Trying to listen, learn, and communicate.
- *Question:* What is the Council’s role as an advisory council?
Answers: Legislation says “to advise and assist.” More and more, the Council is going to be asked to sign off as the advisory body for a grant, program, or initiative, so there’s a need to be informed. Assist agencies to think differently—for that we need to know what it really looks like.

Dialogue about how to get beyond the restrictions. Need to be the reality testers, to test the realities, e.g. the specific targets for the APR. The job of the Council also is to ask why something hasn't been asked. Research and data do have the capacity to inform policy—if we have that ability, we can also be timely.

- *Question:* How can parent representatives be more effective in advising and assisting?
Answers: Ask about what you don't understand. Keep looking at the Report to the Governor and let it influence our work.
- *Session wrap up:* In public health there is a grass roots effort to focus on health literacy—i.e., how language is used—knowing the right questions to ask, using teach back, looking at how much information and what kind of information is shared. Maybe questions are as good as information. Having one Council is good, but we are trying to meet many different requirements. It is hard to distill everything in a way that's understandable for everyone—and sometimes maybe there is no answer. Jane Happe suggested that small groups can become informed and then explain to others in their own words. (see more in afternoon discussions.)

Activity 4—Small Group Discussion

What insights did you gain about the scope of early childhood work across the state and how this work is connected?

- Responses [limited to one insight per table]
 - Our partnerships at the state level need to translate into local partnerships—to support communities at local level.
 - Seeing a face with a name helps—makes pathways to get to the right person.
 - Importance of relationships to get things done.
 - Importance of signing off—how to do it responsibly.
 - Six divisions in DHHS—how they are represented on the Council and how they come from different worlds.

Activity 5—Working Lunch

Discuss examples when you have experienced innovative and creative ways of participating in committee and Council work.

Activity 6—Public Comment

- ***Rae Anderson:*** Eleanor Kirkland recognized Rae Anderson and thanked her for her contributions to ECICC as the NCCIC Region VII State Technical Assistance Specialist, federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The retreat will be Rae's last ECICC meeting in this capacity due to the Office of Child Care's re-design of their child care technical assistance network (CCTAN).
- ***Visit with the Governor:*** Heather Gill explained that she, Pam Dobrovolny, and Mike Adams would be leaving the retreat for a short time to meet with Governor Heineman to talk about his priorities and the ECICC Report to the Governor.
 - Later in the afternoon, Heather reported on the visit that also included Dr. Shafer (DHHS), Cheryl Wolff and another staffer from the Governor's Office. Heather reported that a focus of the Governor's is parent involvement and they talked about how to support it. The group discussed early childhood mental health and LB603 from the legislative Behavioral Health Oversight Committee. The Governor also talked about how competing funding requests might impact funding for Medicaid.

Activity 7–Small and Large Group Discussion

*What changes would you like to see in Council meetings to improve your understanding of the issues, programs and outcomes the state agencies are addressing in early childhood?
Suggestions for improving the current committee structure of ECICC?*

- Mary Lee introduced the afternoon activity as an opportunity to operationalize the insights gathered from the morning and the working lunch discussions. Groups met for a short time in table discussions and briefly reported their suggestions.

Small group report out of suggestions to improve Council operations:

- Orientation is so overwhelming–find ways to break up the information/time.
 - Try a buddy/mentor system to help new members.
 - Hand off a retiring member's notebook to in-coming new members.
 - Provide dividers [for materials].
 - Extend members' terms.
 - Introduce topic with a case study and then work backwards.
- The table groups combined into two larger groups to further discuss improving Council meetings and committee structure. Each group recapped their discussion in a report out:

Group I:

Communication:

- Electronic copies vs. hard
- Use some kind of template to inform about the reason/importance of what we're getting, e.g., FYI, important issue, voting, etc.
- Communicate online, e.g., Wiki, chat rooms, forums.

Meetings:

- Structure agenda–start with old business, updates of progress, action items
- Regularly review charge of the Council
- Put mission statement on the back of table signs

Committees:

- GBC is too large to function.
- Use task force structure to work on specific issues.
- Smaller, functional groups to look at required and/or priority areas, e.g., APR group, data group, K- readiness group
- Committee work becomes work done elsewhere with report to Council.

Team-building:

- Have annual retreat.
- Focus on action plan to focus rest of year.
- Inactive members–develop information and policies, provide incentives to feeling connected.
- Use buddy-mentor system to help navigate in the system.
- Intentionally build leadership in the parent group.
- Interactive linkages, acronyms, referencing it on what we talk about.

Group II:

- Consent agenda—grouping items that would pass with one roll call vote; pull out items that need attention/discussion.
- Template idea, how to set people up for success. Don't know what you don't know.
- Report out—critical items only, consistency in how information is shared.
- Look at right sub committees.
- Work of GBC: tie to pillars of Governor's Report.

- Use set of data to understand what some of the issues are.
- Structure must keep families and parents actively involved.
- Family Leadership Team: help with strategies; work with family engagement across the system to gather from a diverse perspective, e.g., Head Start, English language learners, immigrant families, homeless—all gathered into the whole.
- Celebrate successes.

Clarification of Next Steps and Closing

Mary Lee encouraged retreat participants to reflect upon objectives, to remain engaged and purposeful, to reflect on the process of the day and to evaluate how the work of the Council will be stronger because of it.

Heather thanked everyone for their participation in the day's work. The Steering Committee will review the suggestions and decide how to use them to move forward in the work of the Council.

Susan Dahm will provide minutes of the retreat activities and Terry Rohren will compile groups' notes from the flip charts, which will be distributed to ECICC members and technical assistants.

The retreat ended at 3:00 p.m.

Attached:

- ✓ Retreat Flip Chart Notes

**Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council
Retreat—August 26, 2011**

Flip Chart Notes

What presentations have you found most helpful—

Family Story

Better understanding of what goes into care, education and well-being of child

Refreshing to see team work occurring-learning of resources out there

ECICC has helped better understanding funding, programs and resources, hearing from different departments.

Lots of things get done on committees

Knows that if issues get brought up they will get addressed

Like rural representation here.

Responsiveness of others on committees

Group feels comfortable to ask questions.

Like relationship building

State employees “get it” and are human

It isn’t “parents” vs. “the state”

Learning about and hearing updates from other state agencies.

Networking, meeting people and getting to know them—how to access info and what we need.

Building relationships

Opportunities to work in small groups; focused topics/interests

Council provides opportunity to take the broad view; ownership of issues.

Opportunity to connect with federal/national agenda

When do you feel most engaged in the Council work—

When asked for feedback specifically

Being asked to help with problem solving and feedback

Feels very engaged throughout meetings all helpful—it is harder to stay engaged once gets home. Feels very isolated in her area

Most engaged when put to work.

Smaller more focused group work.

Council is inclusive, provides welcoming, safe place to ask questions, cross-sector representation

Make certain we continue to have tribal representation.

Issues that State Agencies anticipate we will be addressing in the future

Continuing the work with likely budget cuts

Race to the top

Data system and data use

Home visitation

Quality Early Learning Environments

School Readiness

Ways to be creative partners

State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report—Possible have a special group that really invests in better understanding and working with the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report.

Focus on results of outcomes.

What insights did you gain about the scope of early childhood work across the state?

You need to get to the right person to ask your questions. So ask your questions and then they will get you to the right person to help. Seeing a face also helps.

Linkages happen because of the people in the departments that Choose to work together. Relationships are what make it work.

Scope of work looks different depending on part of state is implementing.

Common goals

What is our role as an advisory body?

Review and support reports, and grant requests.

Help state see where the pinches and rubs are for the state.

Assisting us in understanding how it looks in the community.

Help us think about possible solutions to our challenges.

Help us figure out how to move it forward.

Annual Performance Report—ChildFind—Help us figure out why the national target isn't being met.

Help us use data to set research agenda.

Focus more on report to Governor

What changes would you like to see in Council meetings to improve your understanding of the issues, programs and outcomes from the state agencies?

It is difficult to learn, understand, review and vote at the meeting. (Send information out ahead of time or use technology Wiki with chat room function attached to email. Start forums for specific topics sends email alerts when something new is posted then info can be reviewed before get to the meeting.

Need to check out public meeting rules.

Consider if everyone has internet or the ability to print

Communication—Email electronic vs. hard copy (option or choice for packets)

Always refer to the Linkages chart at each meeting or when you give updates show where they fit on the map/chart.

Linkages chart-have 2 examples-one with Federal top layer and one with state or local

Briefing: Short term (here is the immediate issues) Long Term—What is to come.

Small groups or people read for meeting, then report out (executive summaries)

Structure Agenda—Important decision making items up front, updates at end of agenda.

Provide executive summaries and full reports.

Possible change committee structure—smaller task group (i.e. data, outcomes)

Create a standard template for information: Person, department where on org chart, what they need from ECICC, how it will impact early childhood in the state, Priority level, and how it is connected to our work.

Consistent method for communication,. Email. Few packets for those who forget their packets at home. Council members responsible to read old business.

Break Gaps and Barriers committee down to subcommittees or task forces by grant or by agency, or by topic. i.e. APR Report. Pull in non-ECICC people.

Use phone conferences in between Council meetings.

Functional small groups that then educate the full group. How can we do this with the open meetings act?

Technical person to look at data or determined by priority areas. APR Group, Data group, Kindergarten readiness group. Look at Systems Team priorities and try not to duplicate.

Start with agenda items if action is required

Can keep to show progress

List action items at the front of the agenda.

Have timeframes. E.g. 2 weeks prior to the meeting get the information that you need to review before the meeting.

Helpful at beginning of meeting to state mission of Council- or put on the agenda or on table tents.

Email short synopsis of issue or report ahead of the meeting. Synopsis you include 1) summary of topic, 2) what do I need to do at the council meeting, 3) what questions are there, 4) how will this impact children in NE

Put coding on message to Council members—FYI or Urgent

Devote meeting time for focus topics. E.g. Results Matter

Host annual retreat

Action Plan Priorities

Engage inactive members

Buddy/mentor new members

Build leadership in parents.

Forum to highlight available resources

Create Wiki electronic organization/chat room and forum—connects to email. Can have forums prior to the meeting.

Structure of meetings—Old business-follow-up/update to show progress and celebrate what has been done, action items at beginning of meeting-prioritize, review charge of council at beginning of meeting, mission statement on name table signs.

Focused summary of individual topics/priorities.

Whole ECICC meets at Gaps and Barriers time on Gaps and Barriers issues.

Orientation—tighten up, assign “buddy”, provide materials head of orientation session, use case study when presenting (like family story) to help people understand and apply.

Agenda setting—

- Agenda more purposeful

- Governor’s report what next with expectations and roles between reports, chart and linkages.

Use smaller grouping at tables in meeting (like today’s set up).

I would like to see a mix of like and different groups during the meetings so you get to know others better and their perspective, and expertise.

Provide visuals and charts to make it clearer, use the linkages chart so people have a reference point. Provide short concise information of what we are talking about.

Use the Report to the Governor as a reference point during the meetings.

Provide less paper---shorter paper—use email.

Report out on agenda for committees. Have report out include any action items and next steps and that is it. Information should focus only on critical pieces and recommendations. Emphasize that detail comes from the committee minutes.

Mix group and plan so agency positioned.

Consider possible ways to save paper.

Have the Gaps and Barriers Committee focus on the four focus areas of the Report to the Governor—

Have a regular data report as part of the meetings. What is the data telling us.

We should begin prioritizing what should be kept in place if funding is cut.

Utilize a consent agenda to eliminate the need for multiple roll call votes during the meeting.

Group agenda items that we need feedback on during the agenda

Concerns about a separate family committee

Family Leadership Team should be Family Engagement Team and examine more specifically how we do family engagement across all early childhood services.

Consider having focus groups for family input.

Do we need to determine if we have the right committees?

We should celebrate successes more frequently.

There should be process for gathering local needs for the gaps and barriers committee to discuss.

How information is presented—presentations should be shorter, more concise, clarify what is expected, what will be the impact, where does the information fit in the “flow chart”.

Have smaller working groups during the meetings to address specific topic issues-make the working groups purposeful and productive.

The meetings should be a safe environment for questions and be alert for what Council members don't know or have any information about

Strive to have information to the Council members 7-10 days before the meeting.

Tie Gaps and Barriers to the activities in the Governor's Report.

Use a data set to educate and direct a discussion at a meeting.

Structure must keep families and parents actively involved.

Put photos on the ECICC web-page that can help people be clear on who does what.